them. Was he not master of the two great maritime commonwealths which had once shared the mass of Eastern trade between them? England's intrusion upon the Mediterranean basin was a never-ceasing irritation to all the Latin powers. Her commercial prosperity and her mastery of the seas increased the exasperation of France, as threatening even her equality in their ancient rivalry. From the days of the first crusade all Frenchmen had felt that leadership in the reconstruction of Asia belonged to them by virtue of preoccupation. Ardent republicans, moreover, still regarded France's mission as incomplete even in the liberalizing of the Continent; and the Department of Marine under the Directory stamped its paper with the motto, "Liberty of the Seas." Imaginative forces, the revolutionary system, and the national ambition all combined to create ubiquitous enthusiasm for the conquest of the Mediterranean. To this the temperament and training of Bonaparte were as the spark to the tinder. It was with willing ears that the Directory heard his first suggestions about the Venetian isles, and subsequently his plans for the capture of Malta, which was to be followed by a death-blow to England's supremacy in the Levant by the seizure of Egypt and the dismemberment of Turkey.

As early as May fourteenth, 1797, a letter from the conqueror of Italy informed the Directory what naval stores they might hope to secure in the dismemberment of Venice; in the previous year similar estimates had been made with regard to Genoa, Tuscany, and Naples. It was with a Franco-Venetian fleet that Gentili established French administration in the Ionian Isles, whose people, weary of Venetian tyranny, welcomed him as a liberator. The more intelligent among them desired home rule under French protection; the gratitude of the